

From Huffington Post, posted 03/14/2012

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For Artist Peter Tunney, the Time Is Always 'Wow'



Peter Tunney is perhaps the most positive person on the planet. The New York-based art world legend is one of those rare breeds who not only sees the forest *and* the trees, he sees both as spectacular signs of an increasingly robust reason for being. To Tunney, doom and gloom is for the half-empty set, and he's all about that glass being full.

So it's something of a surprise to find that Tunney's most recent series involves skulls. The series, suitably deemed "The Skull Sessions" is laden with what's usually considered a symbol of death. In Tunney's case though the skull is about nothing if not life. Unlike the so-called tortured artist, Tunney looks at things for what good they can do or mean or say. If an image can't provide any of that, well, it's off to the next image.

For Tunney though, there doesn't seem to be an image in the world that he can't skew forward. An electric chair (preferably Warholian), a grisly *New York Post* headline, an old license plate, a choice detail from a contemporary's work, there are literally thousands of images he uses to back up his now trademark, bright-eyed sloganeering. The skulls though are different. They are front and center and doubled and tripled. They are the focus. And like everything Tunney focuses in on, they've got a past -- and a story. Here that past -- and that story -- dates back to his tenure in Africa with the notorious Peter Beard.

"Peter had this table on his front porch at Hog Ranch that was covered in skulls," he says, "elephant skulls, leopard skulls, human skulls. It was a smorgasbord of skulls. I took tons of Polaroids while I was in Africa; years later, when I opened the boxes up, it was those skulls that first struck me."

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G A L L E R Y

Tunney's positive spin on skulls might seem a natural after the last decade's purely positive message paintings (not his term), but it should be remembered that the man not only created his own set of proverbially rose-colored glasses -- he earned them, one mad episode at a time.

There was the near year he lived within the confines of Crobar New York, a period he calls "a parade of priceless pulchritude", where everyone from new-fangled club kids to old world aristocracy came to sate their inner crazy. And of course there were the many, many moons alongside Beard, where supremely beautiful women were barely out-numbered (and out-bared) by the abounding (yet threatened) African wildlife. Tunney sees it all as pivotal to his education.

"All that death and destruction was important," he says. "We spent five years immersed in the dark. We saw beyond the end of the world."

Evidence of that fact can be found in Tunney's same-titled book, *Peter Beard: Beyond the End of the World*, just as evidence of his fixation for skulls can be found in the limited-edition *Skull Style*. Like *Beyond*, *Skull Style* pits Tunney with an extremely gifted fellow traveler; unlike the aforementioned, it pits him with over 100 different artists and designers, including Damien Hirst, Jean Michel Basquiat and Alexander McQueen.

"I'm both happy and proud to have made this list," said Tunney. "And extremely thankful to [Curated Collection editor/publisher] Patrice Faramah for the opportunity."

"I'm here to say everything is gonna be okay," says Tunney. "In fact it already is."

A message like that can only be greeted with one word: "Wow."